

PBS MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWSHOUR
31 May 1984

FILE ON

MACNEIL: Eden Pastora, the Nicaraguan rebel, or contra, leader, is in a hospital in Costa Rica tonight after being slightly wounded in a bomb blast during a news conference. One American woman journalist and three other people were killed and 27 wounded by the bomb. It went off as Pastora, known as Commander Zero, began a news conference in a village occupied by the contras just inside the Nicaraguan border with Costa Rica. The Costa Rican government placed Pastora's hospital room under heavy guard and said that as soon as he was well, he would be deported. Pastora's followers blamed the CIA for the bombing. The Costa Rican government blamed the Nicaraguans. A commercial radio station, Radio Monumental, in Costa Rica, said sources in Pastora's faction of the Revolutionary Democratic Front, or ARDE, said the CIA engineered the attack because Pastora had resisted efforts to join the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, an anti-Sandinista group based in Honduras and financed by the CIA. The American woman killed was Linda Frazier of Portland, Ore., a reporter for a Costa Rican newspaper and wife of an Associated Press reporter. During the Sandinista revolution which overthrew the dictator, Anastasio Somoza, Pastora was a hero in Nicaragua. But he split with the new government when it turned towards Marxism and people began to suffer from shortages.

EDEN\PASTORA (rebel leader): Y estan matando... (voice of translator) They are killing our people. They don't have sugar, they don't have butter, they don't have soap, they don't medicines, no shoes, no clothes. It's the people who are suffering the most.

MACNEIL: Now, at the age of 48, Pastora is the military leader of the Revolutionary Democratic Force. In the bombing, he was reported to have suffered burns on his chest, and shrapnel wounds, but his injuries were said not to be fatal. For more now on the politics within the contra movement, we turn to Robert Leiken, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. Mr. Leiken is a specialist on the politics of Central America and has met with Eden Pastora. He's the editor of the recently published book, 'Central America: Anatomy of Conflict.' Mr. Leiken, first of all, why would Pastora's followers charge that the CIA did this? ROBERT\LEIKEN (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace): Well, first of all, Robin, what I've heard from Pastora's followers, uh, is not that they, uh, thin that the CIA is responsible, but that they feel that it may have bene the work of Basque terrorists, the *ETA, associated with one faction of the Sandinista leadership, associated with Tomas Borge.

Continued

2.

MACNEIL: So in other words, that would tend to support the Costa Rican government's opinion that it was the Sandinistas. LEIKEN: Well, that, that's right. Of course, we're really speculating.

MACNEIL: I see. Would another faction of the contras have any motive for trying to get rid of Pastora? LEIKEN: Well, there have been, as you mentioned, rather strong rivalries and differences among them. But again, Pastora's people seem to feel that it would, that they wouldn't have any motive at this particular point, or at least they weren't prepared to do it at this particular point.

MACNEIL: Now what were the issues dividing Pastora's group working out of Costa Rica from the other group working out of Honduras with CIA backing? LEIKEN: Well, Eden Pastora was a Sandinista and regarded himself as still a Sandinista. Uh, he never accepted the designation of contra or counterrevolutionary. He thought he was attempting to correct a revolution that was off course. Uh, and he, but he believed that the true course of the revolution was what he called the third way between the United States and the Soviet Union. Uh, so he, he really wanted to negotiate, eventually, with the Sandinistas rather than overthrow them. Uh, on the other hand, the contra groups, the groups of, in the north, were not well disposed towards negotiations with the Sandinistas at all. They wanted, they apparently want to overthrow them.

MACNEIL: And is it not, I read it reported that the CIA was trying to encourage the two groups to get together and send, and Pastora did not want to. Is that correct? LEIKEN: Well, Pastora was willing to unite with the other group under certain conditions. One, that the, what he regarded as the Somoza national guard elements, who he feels have the major control of the military wing of that group, of the FDN, that they should be removed, and two...

MACNEIL: Because, since their former behavior under Somoza was such that it discredited the contra movement, is that... LEIKEN: Discredited them, and because they, he felt that they had a program that he regarded as reactionary, which would be a return to the past. Secondly, he felt that the FDN, via these military leaders and a couple of their political leaders, had become a surrogate or a puppet of the CIA, and again, this was in conflict with his view that there should be a third way, an independent course for the Nicaraguan revolution.

Continued

MACNEIL: But he was prepared to join up with them if those two conditions... And were the others and the CIA and the FDN willing to meet those conditions? LEIKEN: Well, apparently not. Uh, they, they, there was some optimism among Pastora's people after the coup in Honduras which removed General Alvarez a few weeks ago. Uh, there was a shift in the Honduran army and a great deal of, apparently, a great deal of receptivity to such a unification. But in the last analysis, the CIA apparently blocked the, those efforts.

MACNEIL: Can the anti-Sandinista forces, uh, do well without Pastora? Do they need his magnetism and his leadership and popularity to succeed? LEIKEN: Well, the group in the north has made some progress. Uh, they have penetrated inside Nicaragua, they have received some support from the population in some areas. But I think the elimination or isolation of Pastora certainly weakens them politically. What it does is put the Nicaraguan people again between the choice of, of alignment with the United States or alignment with the Soviet Union, and I think most, uh, of those who are opposed to the government would prefer a nonaligned course.

MACNEIL: I see. What motive would the Costa Rican government have for putting Pastora, in effect, under arrest in hospital and saying that he would have to be deported when he was well? LEIKEN: Well, it's curious. I think we have here a, a coincidence of perhaps U.S. pressure and Nicaraguan pressure. Nicaragua and Costa Rica recently signed a border pact. Uh, the Costa Ricans have been concerned with the Nicaraguan military buildup, want to stay out of the, uh, out of any wider struggle. On the other hand, the CIA has been putting pressure on Costa Rica also to, uh, take measures against Pastora so as to pressure him to join the FDN and to be subordinate to their leadership.

MACNEIL: I see. Looking at all this, with your knowledge, what would you expect would be the consequences of this incident today? LEIKEN: Well, I think it's probably going to enhance Pastora's reputation. Pastora was considering abandoning the struggle. He had gone very recently to Panama and offered to deliver his troops to Contadora, to the four nations that make up Contadora, uh, which, the group that's trying to reach a regional peace settlement. Uh, apparently, in Panama, the Panamanians and perhaps other members of the Contadora (sic), Contadora group discouraged him, and he was hesitant as to which way to go. This may, uh, decide him to, uh, to stay in the struggle.

MACNEIL: Well, Mr. Leiken, thank you very much for joining us. LEIKEN: You're very welcome. Thank you.